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SUBJECT: COMBATING RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM IN MECKLENBURG-VORPOMMERN: AN
UPHILL BATTLE

REF: A. A) 07 LEIPZIG 018
[B. B\) 07 LEIPZIG 017](#)
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[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: All of the political parties in the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (M-V) Parliament have worked toward a common goal since the right-wing extremist National Democratic Party's (NPD) entry into that parliament in September 2006: to isolate the NPD and to implement programs to combat and prevent right-wing extremist attitudes. Regional demographics and economic and political trends seem to be working against these containment efforts. As an extreme measure, the M-V Parliament passed legislation on October 18, 2007 requesting that the state government work together with other state governments to clear any legal hurdles to an outright ban of the NPD. At the same time, the NPD is trying to soften its image ahead of the 2009 municipal elections by offering non-political activities and volunteering in communities. This cable is part two in a two-part series from ConGens Leipzig and Hamburg (Ref B). END SUMMARY.

Parliamentary Strategies to Combat the NPD

[1](#)2. (U) Immediately following the M-V state election in September 2006, the Christian Democrats (CDU), the Social Democrats (SPD), the Left Party/PDS, and the Free Democratic Party (FDP) worked toward the common goal of making parliamentary life difficult for the NPD. For one, they decided to respond jointly to all NPD proposals and speeches, an approach taken by the Saxon parliament when the NPD entered that parliament. The M-V parliament voted to reorganize public financing regulations so that the two smallest parties, FDP and NPD, received less funding. Public financing was originally designed to the advantage of smaller parliamentary caucuses in order to enable them to fund basic office functions. Funding for the smaller caucuses has now been reduced by about 30 percent so that instead of receiving approximately 700,000 euros per year, the NPD caucus only receives less than 500,000 euros. The parliament also revised committee chair assignment procedures according to party strength to exclude the NPD. In addition, members of parliament voted to ban secret voting in order to avoid any voting defections from the mainstream parties as had occurred in the Saxon parliament. Finally, in order to prevent the NPD caucus from employing right-wing extremists with a criminal history, all parties are now required to produce proof of clean criminal records upon hiring. Within days, the NPD went before the M-V State Constitutional Court, claiming

that the new parliamentary procedures were unconstitutional. The court, however, upheld the new procedures.

13. (U) The M-V political parties have invoked various rules in the parliamentary procedure to block NPD speeches when possible. The parliament now uses all procedural and other rules at its disposal to disadvantage the NPD. The Office of the M-V Parliament President has employed new personnel to focus on NPD parliamentarians' speeches, which, they believe, attempt to conceal anti-democratic sentiments or breeches in parliamentary procedure. The parties also lifted NPD parliamentarian Koester's immunity so he could be tried for a violent act committed at a 2004 demonstration. Further, Director of the M-V Parliament Armin Tebben explained that his office has worked hard to prevent the NPD from using the parliament's Schwerin castle for public events. With agreement from the other parties, the President's office has closed the castle to the public during specific holidays, increased security, and cancelled the parliament's open house.

NPD: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?

14. (SBU) At the same time, the NPD has reoriented its grassroots strategy to make political inroads within the communities. The party's approach has included a softening of its image and an attempt to gain trust within communities by offering activities such as folk dancing and trailblazing courses, as well as assistance with filling out complex unemployment compensation forms. In a meeting with ConGen representatives on July 16, 2007, Interior Minister Lorenz Caffier (CDU) noted that the NPD is focusing on the mid-term goal of winning local posts in the 2009 municipal elections. The NPD leadership encourages party members to volunteer in their communities and join non-political clubs and organizations. The NPD caucus is following a populist strategy in parliament, making proposals to improve healthcare, ban genetically-modified corn, and secure retirement at 65. Another strategy of the NPD is to focus on attracting more women to the

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party. Tebben told Pol/Econ Officer August 23, 2007 that currently the NPD has very few women, but that it appears that the party is trying to change this image as well. According to Sociologist Michaela Koettig only about 20 percent of NPD voters are women.

15. (U) Notably, at the same time NPD caucus members are continuing to attend subculture events throughout Germany. Tebben called this tactic of publicly supporting more mainstream and populist proposals while in closed events advancing National Socialist ideas, the NPD's "Doppelstrategie" (a "double-strategy"). Pol/Econ's contacts believe that the potential for NPD gains in the municipal elections is high, especially in the eastern part of the state, where an unemployment rate in some areas is as high as 35 percent and the emigration of many educated women have left behind a frustrated and uneducated young male population. Tebben also highlighted that the NPD aims to make the right-wing extremist movement into a youth movement. Already, NPD members of parliament tend to be younger than the average. Despite having the highest economic growth rate in Germany in the first half of 2007, M-V also has the highest unemployment rate at 15.1 percent for the entire state. Between 2000 and 2006, M-V's population decreased by 5.3 percent. Of the 4,467 young people between 20 and 25 who left M-V in 2006, 52 percent were young women. Notably, in 2006 there were about eight percent more men than women among 21 to 30 year olds.

National NPD Ban a Solution?

16. (U) Aside from the parliamentary measures to isolate the NPD mentioned above, on October 18, 2007 the M-V Parliament, with

full support of the SPD/CDU coalition and the Left/PDS, passed legislation requesting that the state government work together with other state governments to clear any legal hurdles to an outright ban of the NPD. In 2003 the Federal Constitutional Court ruled that an NPD ban is unconstitutional due to the infiltration of Office for the Protection of the Constitution (OPC) informers into the party's leadership. The court decided that it could not ban a party whose policies may have been shaped in part by government agents. Interior Minister Caffer has set up a working group to gather information on NPD anti-democratic activities and to establish the legal prerequisites for a ban. On November 14, 2007 the parliament passed a constitutional amendment declaring that all public acts must serve the peace and discouraging extremism and racism in the community. On November 15, 2007 Caffer announced new regulations designed to make it more difficult for right- and left-wing extremist groups to use public buildings.

17. (U) The October 26-28, 2007 SPD national party convention in Hamburg also took up the issue of right-wing extremism and delegates sent a strong signal that the NPD should be banned. On October 31, 2007 interior ministers from the SPD-led governments of Schleswig-Holstein, Bremen, Berlin, Sachsen-Anhalt, and Rheinland-Pfalz met in Hannover to coordinate their efforts to ban the NPD. CDU interior ministers, except Caffer, however, rejected any pursuit of an NPD ban reasoning that if the effort failed again, this would only strengthen the NPD.

Programs that Counter the NPD's Influence

18. (U) The national and state governments have recognized the need to combat the NPD and right-wing extremist influence in general through various programs aimed at the youth. The national government provides three sources of funding to combat right-extremism in M-V. The National Ministry for Family, Seniors, Women, and Youth finances local initiatives through its program "Youth for Diversity, Democracy, and Tolerance." The Labor Ministry supports two programs: Xenos (also funded through EU Social Funds) aims to promote tolerance between young German and immigrant adults as they enter the labor market, and "Social City" encourages communities to work together to improve living conditions and increase opportunity for all members. At the state level, significant efforts have also been made to combat and prevent right-wing extremist attitudes since the NPD entered the parliament. Most prominently, the M-V Ministry for Social Affairs and Health opened five "Regional Centers for Democratic Culture" in September in areas where right-wing extremism is prevalent, replacing previous national CIVITAS funding. The centers work with local actors to channel available funding from various sources and develop programming.

19. (U) The state government has also worked to consolidate political education activities at the Ministry of Education,

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Science and Culture to facilitate links between schools, teachers, and political education institutions. In July 2007, the Ministry organized a trip for 25 teachers to Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Israel to study German-Israeli relations and the Holocaust. Starting with the 2007/08 school year, the Ministry also implemented new political education initiatives in schools, including placing a "Coordinator for Democracy Education" at each of M-V's four school "administrative units" and providing 120,000 Euros in funding for class trips to memorial sites from the Nazi and Communist German dictatorships.

In addition, the Interior Ministry financed 25 anti-right-wing extremism projects in the amount of 164,000 Euros through the "State Office for Criminal Prevention" in 2007 and is participating in a nationwide survey of youth researching the origins of right-extremist attitudes. Moreover, the Justice Ministry announced on August 1, 2007 that it would work together with Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt in the Bundesrat to seek tougher sentences for hate crimes nationwide, replacing

probation sentences with jail time when possible. The Ministry is also developing a project to send public prosecutors and judges to schools to discuss extremism and democracy.

¶10. (U) State projects at various ministries to counter right-wing extremism are currently loosely coordinated through an "Interministerial Working Group," which began work in spring ¶2007. The efficiency of this coordination method has yet to be proven and our contacts voiced moderate to strong criticism, saying the funds and initiatives were too spread out to be effective.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) Despite the NPD's high profile antics, such as demonstratively remaining seated during a minute of silence in honor of the victims of the Nazi regime on January 30, the M-V parliament has rather successfully minimized the NPD's effectiveness during its sessions. Tebben nevertheless identified M-V as the NPD's center of power, noting that they use their parliamentary offices as a national base. State Commissioner for the STASI Records Joern Mothes identified the growth of right-wing extremism in M-V as the fault of the established political parties. He stated that they are not providing incentives to young people to become politically active and are having problems attracting a new generation of politicians. Mothes asserted that the old East German system punished self-initiative and now communities are unprepared to deal with the continuing legacy. While many of the preventative programs are well-funded and have dedicated leadership, all of the members of the "Interministerial Working Group" with whom ConGen Hamburg spoke were doubtful that their work could be well coordinated. With its aging population, high unemployment, and exodus of educated youth, M-V will continue to face the growing challenge of the NPD and right-wing extremism. END COMMENT.

¶12. (U) The message has been coordinated with Embassy Berlin and ConGen Leipzig.
JOHNSON